

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2931

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0935

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PLO, SY

SUBJ: PRESIDENT ASAD'S PROPOSAL FOR JOINT SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN
COMMANDS

REFS: A. BEIRUT 3101; B. DAMASCUS 884 (NOTAL)

1. NO HARD FACTS YET AVAILABLE IN DAMASCUS REGARDING
MOTIVATION BEHIND ASAD'S PROPOSAL IN HIS MARCH
8 SPEECH FOR JOINT SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN POLITICAL
AND MILITARY COMMANDS. THE EXACT LANGUAGE IN WHICH
ASAD ADVANCED THIS PROPOSAL WAS AS FOLLOWS: "WE ARE
READY TO ESTABLISH A SINGLE SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN POLITICAL
MILITARY COMMAND. IT IS CLEAR WHAT THIS MEANS. WE
ARE READY TO ESTABLISH A SINGLE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP
THAT WILL LEAD SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN POLICY AND A SINGLE
MILITARY COMMAND THAT WILL LEAD THE SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN
ARMED FORCES. WE ARE READY FOR ALL OF THIS IF OUR
PALESTUNIAN BROTHERS THINK THAT THIS WOULD BE
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HAMONIOUS WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE PALESTINIAN

STRUGGLE....I AM NOT PROPOSING HERE A SPECIFIC FORMULA, BUT MERELY IDEAS WHICH INDICATE THE EXTEND TO WHICH WE ARE READY TO GO IN THE INTERESTS OF THE PALESTINIAN STRUGGLE." TAKEN AT FACE VALUE TEXT SAYS THAT ASAD WAS THROWING OUT IDEA FOR STUDY, PERHAPS BY HIS OWN GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS PLO, AND THAT IS WAS NEITHER RESULT OF CAREFUL PLANNING NOR OR PRIOR COORDINATION WITH PALESTINIANS.

2. NEXT DAY IN ANSWER TO PRESS QUESTION PUT TO HIM BEFORE HIS MARCH 9 MEETING WITH SECRETARY AS TO WHETHER UNIFIED COMMAND WOULD ALLOW SYRIA TO REPRESENT PALESTINIANS AT GENEVA CONFERENCE, ASAD SAID, "IT ALL DEPENDS ON THE RESULTS TAKEN BY THE POLITICAL COMMAND. IN A SENSE, YOU ARE RIGHT; IT WOULD GIVE THE PALESTINIANS THE OPPORTUNITY TO GO TO GENEVA; BUT IT COULD ALSO PREVENT SYRIA FROM GOING TO GENEVA. IT DEPENDS ON THE DECISION WE MIGHT GO TOGETHER OR STAY AWAY TOGETHER."

3. LOCAL OBSERVERS HERE ARE READING PROPOSALS IN ONE OR TWO WAYS, DEPENDING ON WHETHER THEY FAVOR OR OPPOSE CURRENT EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS. THOSE IN FAVOR SEE IN UNIFIED COMMAND AN INSTRUMENTALITY FOR CONTROLLING DISRUPTIVE FEDAYEEN ACTION AS WELL AS A WAY AROUND ISRAEL'S AND U.S.'S REFUSAL TO RECOGNIZE OR DEAL WITH PLO. THEY SEE ASAD BECOMING PRINCIPAL NEGOTIATOR ON BOTH SYRIAN AND PALESTINIAN FRONTS SECONDED BY RANKING PALESTINIANS AS PART OF JOINT COMMAND. THOSE OPPOSED SEE PROPOSALS AS DEVICE INTENDED SIMPLY PUT PRESSURE ON EGYPT NOT TO MAKE SEPARATE AGREEMENT AND AS THREAT TO UNDERTAKE COORDINATED SYRIAN-PALESTINAIN POLITICAL AND MILITARY ACTIONS ON NORTHERN FRONT IF ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN AGREEMENT APPEARS IMMINENT. IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT ASAD MENTIONED TO PRESS BEFORE MEETING SECRETARY POSSIBILITY OF EGYPTIANS EVENTUALLY JOINING JOINT COMMAND.

4. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT ASAD SEES JOINT SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN COMMAND AS MEANS FOR SOLVING PLO-JORDANIAN DISPUTE IN A TRIPARTITE CONTEXT WHICH WOULD KNIT JORDAN
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INTO UNIFIED COMMAND ON NORTHERN FRONT.H FROM HERE IT WOULD APPEAR MORE DIFFICULT FOR JORDAN TO RESIST THI SORT OF APPEAL AND FRAANEWORK THAN IF IT WERE TO COME FROM EITHER SYRIAN OR PALESTINIANS ALONE.O

5. THUSFAR BOTH ASAD'S PROPOSAL AND ARAFAT'S INITIAL WELCOMING RESPONSE ARE WORDS WITHOUT CLEAR SUBSTANCE AND RECENT ARAB HISTORY IS LITTERED WITH UNIMPLEMENTED

JOINT COMMANDS AND UNIONS. EFFECTIVE JOINT POLITICAL
AND MILITARY COMMANDS WOULD REQUIRE VERY CAREFUL
STUDY AND NEGOTIATION BY PARTIES WHO TRADITIONALLY
HAVE JEALOUSLY GUARDED THEIR INDEPENDENCE. UNTIL
EVENTS PROVE OTHERWISE, WE ARE INCLINED VIEW THIS ONE
AS AIMED MORE AT SADAT THAN AT PALESTINIANS IN ORDER TO
MAKE SEPARATE ACTION ON EGYPT'S PART MORE DIFFICULT.
MURPHY

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